

IAMU Comments to STEM Advisory Council Broadband Committee  
SECOND DRAFT

The Iowa Association of Municipal Utilities appreciates the opportunity to participate in this discussion. IAMU represents over 540 communities in Iowa that have a publicly owned water, electric, natural gas, broadband, or storm water utility. We're the largest organization of its kind in the country.

IAMU applauds the Governor for embarking on this Connect Every Iowan initiative and for empowering the STEM Advisory Council Broadband Committee to engage in a conversation with all stakeholders on how the goal of connecting every Iowan might be achieved.

In addition to the private and cooperative broadband ownership models represented on the committee, a third model, public ownership, plays a vital role in Iowa's broadband future. This model exists in twenty-eight communities ranging in population from under 300 to nearly 40,000. In each case, municipal networks were built at the request of their citizens. Each community has a different story, but they each share a common goal: to provide reliable and affordable broadband services to their citizens.

Early this year, then FCC Commission Chairman Julius Genachoski issued a challenge that each state should have at least one community where gigabit internet was available by the end of 2015. In Iowa, we didn't have to wait long as Cedar Falls Utilities accepted the challenge and made gigabit internet available to every home and business in the community. Cedar Falls and Hawarden were among the first in Iowa and the nation to utilize the public ownership model to bring fast, affordable, and reliable broadband to their citizens.

IAMU member broadband utilities have played a key role in several success stories over the past 15 plus years.

- Western Home Communities is a progressive organization in Cedar Falls that provides health care and housing options for seniors. They have recently partnered with the University of Missouri in employing new technology in senior living spaces, with the intent of helping older adults stay in their homes longer. The technology utilizes a number of sensors to monitor resident activity, and Cedar Falls Utilities installed fiber connections directly into the rooms of these residents, allowing the data from the sensing equipment to be quickly transmitted to health care professionals and researchers. The goal of this study is to improve the quality of life for seniors, by diagnosing conditions before they are noticeable by caregivers. Identifying the symptoms at the beginning stages, allows for early treatment, improves the overall quality of life, and saves health care dollars. CFU is proud to play a role in this.
- When the University of Iowa was looking for locations for their regional Child Health Specialty Clinics, access to reliable broadband was one of the primary qualifications. Spencer Municipal Utilities partnered with Spencer Hospital to enable a direct fiber optic connection that enabled real-time communications between UI doctors and the nurses and staff at the clinic.
- Muscatine Community School District launched their 1:1 initiative (one to one), which is an initiative to provide each student with access to their own computer, free of charge, for 24/7 educational use. The District is pursuing

the 1:1 environment in support of their vision to have technology seamlessly integrated into the teaching and learning environments to develop 21st Century Skills for all students. With their 1:1 initiative, each 6th-8th grader receives a white MacBook laptop and each 9th-12th grader receives a MacBook air for use in the classroom and at home. Meeting the District's growing bandwidth needs required an upgrade to fiber-based service, provided by Muscatine Power and Water. Each school building in the district is networked together. Muscatine Power and Water's MachLink(R) Internet service provides high-speed residential Internet service to nearly 60% of the homes in Muscatine, further helping to support students' technological development.

In talking to our members about the stakeholder questions raised by the Committee, several challenges stood out. These challenges are shared by the other utilities.

- Network costs. Broadband networks are expensive to build, and in small towns and rural areas it is sometimes difficult to justify the investment.
- Relevance. There is a lack of perceived need by a segment of our population, especially among older Iowans. And since our rural communities tend to have an older population, it means adoption rates are lower. The state should explore ways to educate under-adopting segments about the value of broadband and its relevance in their lives.
- Affordability. Even if broadband is available and relevant, it has to be affordable. Price is a barrier to

adoption, especially among lower-income Iowans. The state could examine ways to subsidize broadband service to this population segment, especially those homes with school age children. Any proposal to do so must take into account how such subsidies would impact a largely unregulated and nominally competitive market.

IAMU looks forward to continuing to participate in this discussion on behalf of our municipal broadband members, and we welcome any questions you might have.